

# Parental Leave and Fathers' Involvement with Children in Bangladesh: A Comparison with United States

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## INTRODUCTION

Most industrialized nations have made both paternity and parental employment leave available to fathers in conjunction with childbirth. Granting leave is one of the primary policy and program efforts by governments to increase fathers' involvement with their children. Researchers in industrialized nations have investigated how leave has influenced fathers' roles and the gender division of labor within the family (Haas & Hwang, 2008; Seward, Yeatts, & Zottarelli, 2002). These studies are part of a wider attempt to assess and understand the changing roles of men in the family.

In contrast, research dealing with father's participation in child care is severely limited in developing countries. Most gender researchers in these countries have found that families in developing countries are still organized according to very rigorously gender segregated roles (Adams & Trost, 2005). However, the increase of dual earner couples and decline of extended families has challenged the long practiced traditional gender role distinctions. Some family restructuring is taking place. Today fathers in the less developed countries are expected to get more involved with their children and participate in housework to some extent. Despite these changes, parental benefits are usually still gendered. For example, in Bangladesh, while mothers are eligible for three months of paid maternity leave in conjunction with childbirth, no paternity or parental leave is available for the fathers. Lack of leave provisions for fathers in conjunction with childbirth supports the view that child care is solely women's responsibility.

The purpose of this research was to address three questions: (1) To what extent do Bangladeshi fathers take leave for childbirth? (2) To what extent are Bangladeshi fathers involved with children? (3) How do Bangladeshi fathers' involvement and leave taking compare with fathers' practices in the United States (U.S.)? To assess how mothers' employment impacted the extent and nature of fathers' involvement with their children in Bangladesh, fathers in dual earner families were compared to those in single earner families.

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## **PRIOR RESEARCH AND BANGLADESH CONTEXT**

Research has consistently found that men do less work in the home, including child care, than women and that the work each do are qualitatively very different (Coltrane, 2000). Although U. S. fathers spend more time today with their children compared to the fathers in early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Lamb, 2004), U. S. fathers still do a small portion of the child care when compared to mothers (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). In dual earner families where both the parents do paid work, fathers' hours spent with children increases; but it is still significantly less than the hours spent by mothers.

Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine's (1985) four-factor model of motivation, skills and self confidence, social support, and institutional factors has been used by many researchers to understand the determinates of fathers' behavior. According to this model, fathers' motivation is shaped by their own fathers' involvement, early socialization for involvement, proximal socialization, gender-role orientation, and beliefs about gender, fathering, and parenting. Motivation and self-confidence are interactive, and fathers' skills and confidence are enhanced as they get more involved and have positive experience during their involvement. A key component of social support is the attitude and behavior of mothers. Mothers as gatekeepers of fathers' involvement have been the focus of much research (Lamb, 2004; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004; Seward, Yeatts, & Zottarelli, 2002). Mothers' gate keeping often negatively affects fathers' involvement. Some mothers, though overburdened with child care responsibilities, believe that child care is a "woman's job." Some fathers are not welcomed to participate in most child care tasks. This gate keeping role continues throughout childhood according to Pleck and Hofferth (2008). Sampled mothers' involvement was a predictor and also a mediator of fathers' involvement with adolescent children. Finally, social and cultural context, such as socioeconomic background of the parents and workplace characteristics, have been found to impact fathers' involvement (Hass, 2007; 1992; Lamb, 2004; Seward, Yeatts, Zottarelli, & Fletcher, 2006).

Gender ideologies couples hold influence the division of child care, but discrepancies between beliefs and practices are common. Hochschild and Machung (1989) argued that while gender ideologies shape the perception of ideal role for men and women within the family, couple's roles in real life might differ greatly from that perception. Although most parents express egalitarian attitude towards gender roles when it comes to women's participation in labor market, fewer men are positive about it (Haas, 1992). While some studies clearly show that parents' equalitarian beliefs are positively associated with fathers' involvement with children, this association has not been universally supported. Gender role attitudes plus work and family context factors helped explain which fathers took leave according to Pleck (1997) and Hyde, Essex, and Horton (1993); but Seward, Yeatts, Amin, and DeWitt (2006) found only limited support for this association. Although the correlation between parents' expressions of equalitarian gender attitudes and fathers' leave taking were positive, it was not statistically significant.

Mothers' employment status was associated with fathers' involvement with child care in many studies. Fathers are more involved when mothers are employed (Coltrane, 2000), and their involvement increases when mothers are employed for more hours (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2000). Pleck (1997) found in a review of available studies that when

mothers' employment hours increased so did the fathers' amount and proportional share of child care. Fathers in families with employed mothers consistently interacted more with children than fathers in families of non-employed mothers. Pleck concluded that clearly fathers are more involved with children in dual-earner families, and this involvement is positively associated with mother's work hours.

In Bangladesh the relationship between mothers' employment and fathers' involvement with children has received little attention. Unlike most western countries, maternal employment has not become the norm in Bangladesh. But this is changing as during the last few years more women, especially mothers, have been entering the paid labor market. This change means that researchers can now assess whether fathers' involvement will be greater in dual earner families than in single earner families in Bangladesh.

Fathers' employment leave taking is a predictor of greater involvement with children. Pleck (1993) found that fathers who took leave after the birth of their child were more involved with their children than fathers who did not take leave. But other socioeconomic factors, like fathers' income, education, and hours worked per week outside home have been found to be even more important predictors of their involvement with children (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004) though the relationships have not always gone in the direction expected. For example, Seward, Yeatts, Amin et al., (2006, p. 420) found that fathers with lower incomes, fewer years of schooling, and who worked more hours per week outside the home were more involved with their children. Also, mothers having more responsibility for the family's income prior to the birth of the child were associated with greater father involvement.

What roles fathers take is largely shaped by the social and cultural environment of the particular society in which they participate. Bangladesh historically has been a male dominated society. Bangladeshi fathers are viewed as powerful patriarchs who have full authority over the family including both wives and children. Ideal fathers are those who successfully play the instrumental roles of being the breadwinners and protectors of the family. Ideal mothers are those who successfully play the expressive roles of nurturers, caregivers, and companions. This gender division of labor within a typical Bangladeshi family is consistent with Talcott Parsons' views on the ideal gender division of work for families in the United States over half a century ago (cf., Parsons & Bales, 1955). Parsons considered these complementary roles functional for society. But views on the family and family practices have changed in the U.S. since the 1950s (Adams & Trost, 2005). In Bangladesh little has changed.

In Bangladesh, father-mother roles are very much based on traditional attitudes towards gender roles. Gender roles are polarized regarding distinctions between masculine and feminine. One of the essential aspects of femininity is becoming a mother. A Bangladeshi woman finds a sense of fulfillment and a reassurance of her gender identity through becoming a mother. Playing the role of mother, therefore, is valued highly by women themselves and very strongly supported by the patriarchal society. This pattern exemplifies what Coltrane (1989) termed "compulsory motherhood." According to this ideology women should find fulfillment through having children and caring for them. This romanticized view of motherhood is an important factor that shapes a gendered division of child care. Beginning in childhood, women in Bangladesh get countless messages from all agents of socialization

that the ideal woman is one who takes care of the house and cares for husband, children and in-laws. At the same time, men are socialized with messages that doing child care tasks is not "manly" and, therefore, should be avoided (Saraff & Srivastava, 2008). William J. Goode (1963; 1993) in his classic studies of worldwide family trends contended these gender attitudes are slowly changing due in part to feminist movements and Westernization. Goode (1993) identified two related ideologies that emerged with industrialization, the "independence from the extended family" and "equality between the sexes." Both ideologies had altered the traditional views of gender and parenting roles in all nations including those in the third world. Although Bangladesh is among the latter, the change has been much more glacial (Adams & Trost, 2005).

Fathers' socialization and their parents' role-modeling influence their conception of fatherhood (Beaton, Doherty, & Rueter, 2004). How men perceive their fathering role is shaped to some extent by what they have seen in their role models, which is most likely to be from the family of origin (Forste, Bartkowski, & Jackson, 2009). Since women's labor force participation in Bangladesh is a very new phenomenon, most of today's Bangladeshi fathers were socialized in a single-earner family where mothers were homemakers. Only recently have the majority of women been part of the labor force. In 2000, 54 percent of women were in the labor force and in 2007 the percentage rose to 57 (United Nations, 2009)

The employment leave policy in Bangladesh illustrates how gender differences are reflected and reproduced in organizations, social structures, and more generally in the labor market. For women a quite generous leave policy exists. Women are eligible for up to 3 months of paid maternity leave (ILO, 2002). According to the International Labor Organization's (ILO) report the Maternity Benefit Act of 1939 in Bangladesh entitled women workers to 12 weeks of maternity leave, with mandatory postnatal leave of 6 weeks. A specified period of nine months of employment is required before mothers become eligible for benefits. The Act of 1939 prohibits employers from dismissing women workers absent on maternity leave. With the majority of women now in the labor force more women now take advantage of this leave. The ILO (2002) reports for men, no provision exists for leave in conjunction with childbirth. As a result most men take only one or two days leave when the child is born. Some of them even take only a few hours' of leave. In almost all cases when men take leave during childbirth, they use their "casual leave." This leave refers to Bangladeshi employed men's right to take up to 20 days of paid leave due to sickness or other reasons. Research is needed to document to what extent fathers use their casual leave or other forms of leave in conjunction with childbirth, to what extent they get involved in caring the child, and what are the determinants of their involvement including taking leave, and how these pattern vary cross-culturally.

## METHODS

### Data Collection

A non-probability convenience sample of Bangladeshi fathers and mothers was contacted through four key informants using a snowball technique. To recruit couples these informants described the research purpose to their colleagues and couples they knew. To be included, couples had to be parents with at least one child under the age of 12 years. Recruited

couples were asked to provide other possible sample members. Special efforts were made to include dual earner families. The resulting sample included urban educated and mostly middle to upper middle class couples from Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh.

In November and December of 2008, self-administered questionnaires were distributed among fathers and mothers interested in participating in the study. Eventually 59 mothers and 27 fathers returned completed questionnaires. The comparable U.S. study by Seward, Yeatts, Amin, et al., (2006) had a convenience sample of 38 couples. Parents were asked about their child care activities, leave patterns, gender role attitudes, and general demographic characteristics. The questionnaire used was a slightly modified version of the one used by Seward, Yeatts, Amin, et al., (2006). The modifications were needed to address the unique social and cultural context of Bangladesh and to gather data for three additional variables dealing with extended families, having a young child under age 6 at time of birth, and mother's maternity leave. Because extended families are still common in Bangladesh, the questionnaire included a question to determine whether the respondent's family household was nuclear or extended. The rationale for adding this question was that in extended families other relatives living with the couple might help the mother with the newborn and, therefore, influence what leave the father might take.

### **Sample Characteristics**

Demographic and characteristics of the Bangladesh respondents along with the same characteristics for the U.S. sample are presented in Table 1. All the Bangladesh respondents were married as were almost the entire U.S. sample. The Bangladeshi mothers' and fathers' mean ages were older than the averages for the U.S. mothers and fathers, and the gender age gap was less in the U.S. sample. Most of the Bangladeshi mothers had at least one child who was under age 6 at the time of their latest childbirth.

The Bangladeshi parents were more highly educated than the U.S. parents. All the Bangladeshi fathers had at least 16 years of education compared to less than half of the U.S. fathers. Eighty-eight percent of the Bangladeshi mothers had 16 years of education compared to 58 percent of the U.S. mothers. The majority of parents in both samples were from dual earner families, with Bangladeshi mothers having the highest proportion (88%) and the Bangladeshi fathers the lowest proportion at 56%. Around 72% of the Bangladeshi respondents were dual earner couples. Almost all parents were employed and working full-time. A variety of occupations were represented in both samples with most Bangladeshi mothers and fathers plus most U.S. Mothers being in supportive white collar jobs, while U.S. fathers were the most likely to be in service, production, or laborer jobs. Based on reported household incomes, most of the families in both samples belong to the middle to upper middle socio-economic class, but the U.S. parents' income reported on average much higher incomes. Monthly income reported by the other Bangladeshi households indicates that they were either from the lower middle or upper-lower classes. Another important difference in the sample was that almost half of all the Bangladeshi families are extended in nature. They had at least one relative outside the nuclear family living with the couple. Extended family families are so rare in the U.S. that no comparable information was gathered.

Table 1.

**Characteristics of Sampled Parents in Bangladesh and those in the United States**

Variables	Mothers		Fathers	
	Bangladesh	U.S.	Bangladesh	U.S.
Marital status (percent):				
Married	100%	92%	100%	92%
Never married		8%		5%
Separated				3%
Age (mean number of years)	34.5 (5.47) <sup>a</sup>	32.2 (4.6) <sup>a</sup>	40.12 (6.2) <sup>a</sup>	34(5.7) <sup>a</sup>
Have young children (under 6)	51%		79%	
16 years of education (percent)	88%	47%	100%	58%
Dual-earner families	80%	74%	56%	74%
Employed full-time (> 30 hours)	83%	89%	96%	94%
Managers & professionals (percent)	17%	38%	16%	28%
Supportive white collar jobs	76.3%	51%	69%	33%
Service, production, & laborer jobs	6.8%	11%	15%	39%
Income per month				
Tk. 20,000 to Tk. 60,000 <sup>b</sup>	64.4%		38.4%	
USD \$1,667 to \$3333 <sup>c</sup>	45%		51%	
N	59	38	27	38

<sup>a</sup> Standard deviations (SD) in parentheses.

<sup>b</sup> Equal to USD range of \$294 to \$882 (using exchange rate of Tk. 68 = \$1)

<sup>c</sup> Equal to Taka range of Tk. 113,356 to 226,644 (using exchange rate of \$1 = Tk. 68 \$1)

## Measures

A summary of the research variables is presented below with some details also presented in Tables 3 and 4. More details, a copy of the questionnaire, and additional statistical tables are available from the first author. To facilitate comparisons of fathering between Bangladesh and the U.S., almost all the same measures were used in this study as were used in Seward, Yeatts, Amin, et al.'s (2006).

### *Fathers' Involvement with Children*

Measuring fathers' involvement with children included three different aspects and a total of 16 items. *Fathers' time spent with children* was based upon how many hours per week parents reported they were together with their children and how many of these hours were devoted to one-on-one activities. Each parent was also asked how many hours per week their spouse or partner spent with their children and how many of these were devoted to one-on-one activities. *Participation in specific child care tasks* was based upon parents' reports of who did 14 child care tasks (see Table 3 for items and responses). Twelve of the items (excluding "feed child" and "change diapers" as these were not relevant for older children) were summed and divided by 12 to form a *total tasks index*. No couples' data were available from the Bangladeshi sampled fathers and mothers so the averaging procedure used by Seward, Yeatts, Amin et al., (2006, pp. 213-214) for their couples was not possible.

Seward, Yeatts, Amin et al., averaged what fathers reported about their involvement with children with what the mothers reported for the fathers' involvement. But their conclusion that "mothers' reports on fathers' involvement were usually close to what the fathers had reported" (p. 414) suggests that the means from both sample can be very comparable.

### *Parents' Attitudes*

Five statements were used to measure parents' gender role attitudes. The statements were: "Women can be as interested in employment as in children," "The man is the one who should be the family's primary decision maker" (values reversed), "A father can take good care of child like a mother," "Child care responsibility should be equally shared between fathers and mothers," and "A father should take leave from work for caring the child after the birth of the child." Parents were asked to choose a response from the three options: agree completely, agree to some extent, and do not agree. Higher scores represent more egalitarian beliefs. The possible range of values for each of these items was 1 to 3.

### *Parents' Employment*

*Fathers taking employment leave* was based upon fathers' response of either no or yes to the question: "Did you take any leave or time off from your work due to your child's birth or adoption?" *Hours worked per week outside the home* was based upon employed parents' response to: "How many hours do you work on average per work week?" A question about each parent's mother working outside the home asked in the Seward, Yeatts, Amin, et al.'s (2006) study was not included in the Bangladesh survey. This measure of possible role modeling was dropped because Bangladeshi women's participation in the labor force is a very recent phenomenon. Only a very few of the respondents would have had mothers who worked outside the home when they were growing up.

### *Other Demographic Aspects*

The demographic and socio-economic variables included in the analyses were *age* (in years), *education* (years of schooling), *occupation* (managerial/professional, supportive white collar, and service, production, laborer), and *household income* earned per month using brackets [less than Bangladeshi Taka (Tk.) 10,000, Tk. 10,001 to 20,000, Tk. 20,001 to 40,000, Tk. 40,001 to 60,000, Tk. 60,001 to \$80,000, Tk. 80,000 to Tk. 100,000, or over Tk. 100,000]. The exchange rate in relation to the U.S. Dollar (USD) at the time of the study was 68 Taka to 1 USD. *Type of household* was a dummy coded variable where 0 indicated the family reported a single income earner, while 1 indicates both the husband and wife were employed. Since the population in Bangladesh is very homogenous in terms of race and ethnicity, no question on racial and ethnic identity was included in the questionnaire.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were recorded and analyzed in SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). Univariate statistics were used to describe the sample and bivariate analysis was also performed on the data. Most results were compared to the findings on fathers' involvement from the U. S. sample.

## RESULTS

The results are presented in four sections. The first section described fathers' leave taking pattern. Fathers' involvement in child care is described in the second section. The third section describes fathers' involvement based on their taking employment leave. The last section presents attitude of parents' towards gender roles.

### To What Extent do Fathers Take Leave for Childbirth?

The number of parental leave days taken by Bangladeshi fathers is presented in Table 2. The number of leave days taken ranged from no leave to 15 days. Almost 77 % of the fathers reported taking leave for at least one day or more. This proportion is higher than leave taken by U.S. fathers. In the Seward, Yeatts, Amin, et al.'s (2006) study, less than half (45%) of the 36 employed fathers reported taking leave. Although a higher proportion of Bangladeshi fathers took leave compared to U.S. fathers, their leave was for a shorter time. For example, while 44% of the U.S. fathers took at least two weeks of leave, only 4% of Bangladeshi fathers reported such a long leave. While in the U.S. study the longest leave reported was 60 work days or 12 weeks, among the sampled Bangladeshi fathers the longest leave reported was only 15 days.

Table 2.

#### Number of Days Bangladeshi Fathers Took Leave for Childbirth by Household Type

Days of leave	Household type		
	All households	Single earner	Dual earner
No leave	23.3%	25%	22.6%
1 to 2	22.1%	45.8%	12.9%
3 to 6	36.1%	25%	40.3%
7 to 13	15.2%	4.2%	19.3%
14 and over	3.5%		4.8%
N	86	24	62

The most common reason that Bangladeshi fathers gave for either not taking leave or for taking very short leave was that they did not have any leave days available. Because the leave has to be taken as "sick leave" or "casual leave," Bangladeshi fathers either did not want to exhaust all these leave days or they did not have any more days left. This is consistent with the U.S. findings where most studied fathers (74%) only took leave when it was paid. Like the Bangladeshi fathers, the vast majority of U.S. sampled fathers used vacation time (61%), personal days (17%), or sick leave (11%) (Seward, Yeatts, Amin, et al., (2006, p. 18)

Some differences occurred in the leave days taken by Bangladeshi fathers in single earner versus those in dual earner families. Fathers in dual earner families were more likely to take longer leaves in conjunction with childbirth than father in single earner families. While in dual earner households 24% fathers took leave for 7 days or over, in single earner households only 4% took leave that long. Or viewed another way, almost 71% of the fathers from single earner households took no leave or less than 3 days of leave whereas only 36% fathers from dual earner households did the same.



## **To What Extent are Fathers Involved with Children?**

Measures of Bangladeshi and U.S. fathers' involvement with children are presented in Table 3. Regarding time, mothers and fathers were asked about how many hours on a typical week does the father spend with children on one-on-one activities, such as playing, reading, and talking to the child. Bangladeshi mothers reported that on average fathers spent a little over 4 hours per week while Bangladeshi fathers reported that on average they spent less than 4 hours per week. The values reported ranged from one to 18 hours per week. Two discrepancies are noteworthy when compared to the figures from the U.S. study. U.S. parents report more fathers' involvement with their children when compared to Bangladeshi parents' reports. The reported amounts for the U.S. fathers were two and a half times higher as reported by the mothers and over 4 times higher as reported by the fathers. Further Bangladeshi fathers reported lower averages than Bangladeshi mothers, which was the reverse of the pattern in the U.S. study by Seward, Yeatts, Amin, et al., (2006) and almost all other studies in the U.S. (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004).

A comparison of mothers' and fathers' responses on parents' involvement in 14 child care tasks shows that child care is predominantly women's responsibility in both samples. Unlike for hours spent, the reports by mothers and fathers are virtually identical. Bangladeshi fathers are less involved with child in all the domains except buying food, buying clothes, and taking the child to doctor. The means for each of these three items were very near or over 3.0. All these tasks are done outside of the home or involve directly paying someone. Tasks done entirely inside the home or not involving direct handling of cash are done mostly by mothers. These include preparing food, washing clothes for the child, and arranging child care. Unlike in the U.S., in Bangladesh paid babysitting is still not a common practice. Most urban middle class families have maids who usually live with them and take care of the children in the absence of parents. If a household does not have a maid, parents who need help with babysitting usually turn to their neighbors or relatives.

U.S. parents' reports indicate that the tasks in which U.S. fathers have the most involvement are different than those for the Bangladeshi fathers. The U.S. fathers were the most likely to have more responsibility for teaching child something new, putting child to bed, getting up at night, and reading to child, but their mean scores were even lower ranging from 1.9 to 2.64 when compared to the scores for the Bangladeshi fathers. The limited number of items and low mean scores for fathers in both nations clearly demonstrate that gender segregation still plays a powerful role in the practice of child care responsibility.

As reported in Table 4, Bangladeshi fathers in single earner families were reported to have spent more hours on one-to-one activities with their children than fathers in dual earner families. In single earner households on average fathers spend a little over 5 hours a week on one-to-one activities with their children. In dual earner families fathers spend on average just over three and half hours per week on one-to-one activities with children. Fathers in dual earner families are more likely to get non-family help with child care, such as day care or hired help and have less need to spend time with children.

Despite the difference in hours, when parental participation for specific child care tasks such as buying food, preparing food, feeding child, etc. (see Table 3 for complete list and

Table 3.

**Means and Standard Deviations for Mothers' Versus Fathers' Reports on Father Participation in Child Care for Bangladesh and U.S.**

	Mothers' Reports		Fathers' Reports	
	Bangladesh	U.S. <sup>a</sup>	Bangladesh	U.S. <sup>a</sup>
<i>Fathers' time spent with children:</i>				
Hours per week fathers devoted to one-on-one activities	4.12 (3.36) <sup>b</sup>	10.82 (13.71) <sup>b</sup>	3.64 (2.66) <sup>b</sup>	5.33 (15.81) <sup>b</sup>
<i>Participation in specific child care tasks:</i> (1=mother mostly, 2=mother more, 3=both equally, 4=father more, 5=father mostly)				
Buy food for child	3.22 (1.02)	1.89 (1.04)	3.67 (1.11)	1.94 (1.26)
Prepare food for child	1.58 (.62)	1.72 (.94)	1.59 (.67)	1.75 (1.00)
Feed child	1.85 (.78)	1.87 (.88)	1.78 (.58)	1.68 (.87)
Change diapers	1.85 (.78)	2.15 (.78)	1.89 (.70)	2.19 (.90)
Put child to bed	2.42 (.95)	2.03 (.90)	2.44 (.80)	2.38 (1.21)
Buy child's clothes	2.93 (.81)	1.57 (.83)	3.00 (.88)	1.54 (.80)
Wash child's clothes	1.42 (.68)	1.41 (.76)	1.67 (.78)	1.89 (.91)
Arrange child care	1.36 (.71)	1.46 (.74)	1.52 (.70)	1.57 (.78)
Play with child	2.46 (1.04)	2.38 (.86)	2.74 (.81)	2.65 (.98)
Read books to child	2.17 (.87)	1.94 (.87)	2.37 (.79)	2.23 (.81)
Teach child to do something new	2.59 (.70)	2.47 (.77)	2.63 (.79)	2.64 (.80)
Comfort the child when sick or tired	2.37 (.76)	2.05 (.85)	2.41 (.75)	2.16 (.83)
Take child to doctor	2.95 (.73)	1.89 (.97)	3.04 (.71)	2.16 (1.0)
Get up at night	2.47 (.89)	2.11 (.56)	2.7 (.61)	2.31 (.51)
N=	59	37	27	37

<sup>a</sup>Seward, Yeatts, Zottarelli, et al., (2006, p. 4)<sup>b</sup> Standard deviations (SD) in parentheses.

Table 4.

**Bangladeshi Father's involvement with children by family type**

Involvement	Household type			
	Single earner		Dual earner	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
One-on-one activity hours per week with child	5.17	4.85	3.52	2.10
Total tasks index <sup>a</sup>	2.37	0.66	2.38	0.69
N	24		62	

<sup>a</sup> Twelve of the 14 specific child care items listed in Table 3 were summed and divided by 12 to form a *total tasks index*. The items "feed child" and "change diapers" were excluded because they were not relevant for older children.

response scale) was measured the scores were virtually the same for fathers in single earner households and dual earner households. This is indicated by the *total tasks index* scores reported in Table 4. In both types of family households, mothers were reported to on average be more likely to perform the specific tasks than fathers.

### Leave Taking and Involvement with Children

Data on fathers' involvement with children based on whether they took leave or not is presented in Table 5. Bangladeshi fathers who took leave are reported to spend more time with children and be more involved with them in almost all of the specific child care tasks. Bangladeshi fathers who took leave were reported to be spending about 21 hours per week together with the children. For the fathers who did not take leave the comparable amount was just under 19 ½ hours, which is over one and half hours less per week. For the times spent engaging in one-on-one activities with the child a more substantial difference was reported. While Bangladeshi fathers who took leave reported spending on average of over 4 hours per week on one-to-one activities, their counterpart who did not take leave reported only just over 3 hours on average. Except for arranging babysitting, for all the specific child care tasks, fathers who took leave have higher means compared to those who did not take leave. The higher means suggest more equal involvement.

These findings are consistent with those for the U.S. fathers. U.S. father who took leave were reported to spend, on average, more time with their children than did fathers who had not taken leave, especially for one-on-one activities (Seward, Yeatts, Amin, et al., 2006). Furthermore, for 12 of the 14 specific child care tasks, U.S. fathers who had taken leave had higher means than fathers who had not taken leave. But the differences between the means were substantial for only two tasks, the preparation of food and taking the child to the doctor.

### Attitudes towards Gender Roles in Child Care

Data on the attitudes of fathers and mothers towards gender roles and child care responsibilities are shown in Table 6. As their higher means indicate, fathers report less equalitarian attitude towards gender roles in regard to child care when compared to mothers'

Table 5.

**Mean Comparisons for Effects of Fathers' Leave-Taking Upon  
Parents' Scores for Fathers' Child Care**

	Did Not Take Leave		Took Leave	
	Bangladesh	U.S. <sup>b</sup>	Bangladesh	U.S. <sup>b</sup>
<i>Fathers' time spent with children:</i>				
Hours per week fathers spent with child	21.11	38.59	19.49	38.73
Hours per week fathers devoted just to one-on-one activities	3.20	12.16	4.13	14.70
Participation in child care task (1=mother mostly, 2=mother more, 3=both equally, 4=father more, 5=father mostly):				
Buy food for child	3.30	1.84	3.39	2.13
Prepare food for child	1.60	1.42	1.60	2.23
Feed child	1.70	1.71	1.83	1.92
Change diapers	1.70	2.04	1.87	2.33
Put child to bed	2.10	2.32	2.49	2.16
Buy child's clothes	2.80	1.55	2.97	1.63
Wash child's clothes	1.20	1.58	1.53	1.75
Arrange child care	1.50	1.50	1.40	1.60
Play with child	2.10	2.53	2.56	2.53
Read books to child	1.90	2.06	2.29	2.17
Teach child to do something new	2.30	2.58	2.63	2.63
Comfort the child when sick or tired	2.30	2.16	2.40	2.06
Take child to doctor	2.90	1.76	2.99	2.13
Get up at night	2.50	2.17	2.51	2.31
N=	20	20	66	16

<sup>b</sup>Seward, Yeatts, Amin, et al., (2006; p. 414)

reports. The means for the statement "Women can be as interested in employment as in children" was 1.96 for the fathers versus 1.43 for mothers. Among the 5 statements on gender roles, fathers and mothers expressed the most positive attitude on sharing child care responsibilities equally. Almost all the mothers completely agreed with this statement with a mean of 1.05. The fathers were not far behind with a mean of 1.35. Despite these more equalitarian attitudes on equally sharing responsibilities of child care followed by attitudes towards fathers' need to take leave, when it comes to women working outside the home, decision making, or who is the better nurturer both fathers and mothers hold less equalitarian attitudes.

Table 6.

**Bangladeshi Mothers' and Fathers' Attitudes towards Gender Roles**

	Mothers' (n=57) Mean (SD)	Fathers' (n=26) Mean (SD)
Women can be as interested in employment as in children <sup>a</sup>	1.43 (.62)	1.96 (.85)
The man is the one who should be the family's primary decision maker (values reversed)	1.43 (.68)	1.67 (.78)
A father can take good care of child like a mother	1.53 (.66)	1.67 (.73)
A father should take leave from work for caring the child after the birth of the child	1.28 (.57)	1.44 (.78)
Child care responsibility should be equally shared between fathers and mothers	1.05 (.22)	1.35 (.49)

<sup>a</sup> Values and responses were 1= agree completely, 2=agree to some extent, and 3= do not agree.

**DISCUSSION**

The sampled fathers who took leave spent more time with their children than those fathers who did not take leave. Who took leave was greatly influence by economic cost considerations. The fact that Bangladeshi fathers in dual earner families took longer leave than Bangladeshi fathers in single earner families indicates that fathers who are the sole breadwinner for the family might not be able to afford unpaid leave.

Although the length of leave varied by type of earner household, the proportion of Bangladeshi fathers taking leave did not vary much by household type. In both the single and dual earner family households around 23% of fathers did not take any leave. One explanation of why almost one-fourth of fathers in both types of households did not take any leave might be the absence of support for the concept of "paternity leave." The fact that all of the mothers in dual earner families took maternity leave could be considered a challenge to the belief that men should consider parental leave as a necessary means to get involved with child care. More important to deterring fathers from taking leaves is the fact that mothers' leave is paid, while fathers' leave is unpaid. This prohibits most men from taking any or longer leaves even if they want to. The importance of economic cost has been documented in many studies (Pleck & Hofferth, 2008; Sundström, 1995). Most fathers do not take leave because they feel they cannot afford it.

Other factors such as the organizational or corporate culture where fathers are employed help explain why fathers do not take any or much leave. Most fathers (70%) in this study reported that their family was very important to them. Fathers often report a willingness to get involved with their children, and they feel guilty when they are not (LaRossa, 1988; Pleck & Hofferth, 2008). On the other hand, Hass and Hwang's (1995) found that financial considerations often outweigh men's other concerns about family well-being. When work organizations are based on the assumption that taking care of home and children are women's responsibility and family should not interfere with the workplace, fathers as employees are

likely to make greater efforts to prove their commitment to work rather than family. No wonder 73% of the Bangladeshi fathers responded that their careers were very important to them.

Greater involvement in one-to-one activities with children by Bangladeshi fathers in single earner families, when compared to dual earner families, does not necessarily reflect single earner fathers' greater willingness to be with their children. Rather this could be due to the financial pressure on single earner families that cannot afford to get hired help for child care. Consistent with Seward, Yeatts, Amin, et al., (2006), the Bangladeshi fathers with lower annual income (lower financial capital) and having less education (lower human capital) was associated with increased likelihood of providing child care. Hence, low-income families in both nations are facing a similar situation. The lack of available and affordable child care outside the home pressures fathers to get more involved at home (Glass, 1998).

One interesting contrast between the two nations was that Bangladeshi fathers have greater responsibility in the child care tasks that usually involve work outside the home or services that involve directly paying someone. U.S. fathers have more responsibility for teaching a child something new, putting a child to bed, getting up at night, and reading to a child, but their level of responsibility on these items were lower when compared to the items on which the Bangladeshi fathers had greater responsibility. Overall, the limited number of items where fathers came close or equally shared responsibilities with mothers plus the more typical pattern of less responsibility practiced by fathers in both nations clearly denotes the continuing predominance of gender segregation in the practice of child care.

Although a majority of the Bangladeshi fathers expressed equalitarian gender beliefs, their involvement with children and leave taking practices did not often live up to these beliefs. These findings challenge the contention that gender role attitudes are especially important in understanding the actions of U. S. fathers (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). However, these findings should be carefully interpreted as the social and cultural context of Bangladesh is very different when compared to the U.S. The prevalence of extended family in Bangladesh influences men's perception regarding the need for taking leave from employment. In an extended family, a mother-in-law or other adult relatives, who live with the parental couple, are often available to provide infant and child care. Even fathers with higher egalitarian attitude scores might not perceive the need to be present during childbirth or get involved in child care because more experienced relatives are available to help. All the families surveyed had servants or hired help all year round, which helps explain why fathers' behavior did not always reflect their attitudes.

One example of this discrepancy is as follows. Almost one-fifth of the Bangladeshi fathers think that only men should be the decision makers in families, and around one-third believed that women cannot be both good mothers and work outside the home. Only half of the fathers agreed completely to the statement that a father can take care of the child as well as a mother. But when the fathers were asked about child care, almost two-thirds of them supported fathers being equally responsible with mothers for child care. The same proportion supported fathers taking leave. Hass (1992) found the same discrepancies in Sweden almost 25 years ago. Although most Swedish parents supported the idea of gender equality and fathers taking leave, less than half thought that men and women should participate equally

in the labor market and in child care. But the congruence between beliefs and practices has narrowed a good deal in Sweden since Haas' 1986 survey (Haas & Hwang, 2008).

Another factor helping account for these discrepancies is the "gender contract," which governs social relationships in the families to some extent in all societies (cf., Haas, Hwang, & Russell, 2000). When women's greater family orientation and men's greater employment orientation are taken for granted, the negotiations, if any, on who does child care and who takes leave is likely to be subtly male dominated. When mothers' jobs are considered less important, obviously mothers end up doing most of the child care and take leave instead of fathers.

### **Limitations and Strengths of the Study**

Both of the compared studies share several limitations that restrict generalization to the larger national population. First, the samples were not randomly selected. Second, the samples consisted primarily of individuals with higher incomes and more education who were urban residents. Third, data were gathered at one point in time making causal inferences inappropriate. Fourth, the small samples restricted the type of statistical analyses that could be performed. Finally, the data included only self-reports. On the other hand, the Bangladesh study generated important data on a topic just now starting to gain the attention of researchers in this developing nation. The Bangladesh data will contribute to our understanding of fathering in a developing nation and provide a basis for meaningful comparisons with what has happen in other nations.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

This examination of fathering in Bangladesh focused on patterns for fathers' employment leave taking after the birth of a child and fathers' involvement with children. These patterns were compared to those found in a similar study conducted in the U.S. The national context in which the patterns occurred provides a better understanding of the differences found between nations.

In most industrialized nations, parental leave benefits have been put in place to allow parents an extended employment leave to get more involved with their children and to entitle paid leave for fathers for the first time. Although the U.S. lags behind most industrialized nations in providing parental benefits, the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 provided parental leave for fathers for the first time. But unlike almost all other industrialized nations, the leave comes with no pay provision so the anticipated loss of income means most fathers do not utilize this leave option (Seward, Yeatts, Amin, et al., 2006). Additionally, policies regarding eligibility and minimum requirements often limit leave taking among fathers even in industrialized countries. Some of the most restrictive are in the U.S. On the positive side a growing number of U.S. employers are providing some paid leave for fathers (Seward, Yeatts, Amin, et al., 2006).

In developing nations, paternity or parental leave for fathers is virtually non-existent (Haas, Hwang, & Russell, 2000). While mothers take most of the leave in conjunction with childbirth, fathers continue work with a few hours to few days off from work. While mothers' leave is

often paid, for fathers the leave has to be taken from their "sick leave," "casual leave," or other available leave days. The concept of "parental leave," much less "paternity leave," is not even being considered in most developing countries.

The growing proportion of women entering the paid labor force in developing nations, such as, Bangladesh means more and more dual earner family households. For these families it no longer makes sense just to provide maternity leave. As in Western countries the concepts of "paternity and/or parental leave" need to be introduced and programs put in place in developing countries. Allowing fathers the option of paid leave in conjunction with childbirth could allow more fathers to take leave and get involved with child care early on. Several studies in Sweden (Haas, 1992; 1996; Hwang & Lamb, 1997; Lamb, 2004; Lamb, Hwang, Frodi, & Frodi, 1982; Oláh 2001) have demonstrated the positive effects on the children and stability of families when fathers take leave from work early in their children's lives. If paid paternity and parental leave would become available in Bangladesh like for virtually all fathers in Sweden and many fathers in the U.S, the impact could be substantial. Paid leave for fathers could do more than have a positive impact on fathers' relations with children. It might enhance the relationships between mothers and fathers and the stability of families. Plus, it could help redefine gender roles by recognizing that men can nurture and women can be providers. To assess these possible impacts much more research is needed, especially longitudinal data to understand fathering and its change in less developed countries like Bangladesh.

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